

Schneider, Charles A.

1920

[55 St. Marks Pl., NYC]

August 12th, 1920

Mr. C. A. Schneide  
55 St. Mark's Place  
New York City

Dear Sir:

The coin described in your letter of August 10th is one of those known as 'Civil War Tokens'. During the American Civil War, the Federal Government failed to issue a sufficient supply of one-cent pieces to meet the demands of trade. As a result, merchants had difficulty in making change, and a number of expedients were tried to meet the situation. Among these, was the issue by merchants of small pieces, generally in copper but sometimes of other metal, which they redeemed in quantities of one hundred, or more.

Most of these pieces have on them the name of the merchant or business house issuing them, but quite a number do not carry any mark by which their source can be determined - and the piece you have is one of these.

At the time, these pieces attracted the attention of coin collectors, especially here in New York City, and several of the collectors knowing where they were manufactured, would have specimens struck in metals other than those in which they were originally intended.

We have in this Museum six pieces like the one you describe - one in silver, one in copper, one in brass, two in nickel (one thick and one thin), and one in white metal. The silver piece is, probably, one of those especially struck for a collector; and as this was seldom done except in New York, I think it is fairly safe to assume that the pieces of this type were all issued in New York. While these pieces attracted the attention of collectors during the period of their issue, they have not proved particularly attractive since then and the demand for them is not great. This is, also, probably due to the fact that there are very nearly eight thousand known varieties of them, and to make anything like a complete collection would occupy a tremendous time. As a result, they have not shown any great value in the auction markets, and I do not believe that your piece would sell for more than ten or fifteen cents.

Very truly yours,

Assistant to Curator

W/E



August 17th, 1920

Mr. Charles A. Schneider  
55 St. Mark's Place  
New York City

Dear Sir:

I have your letter of August 14th. In my reply to your previous enquiry, I wrote upon the assumption that you would not have asked for information unless you believed our knowledge was sufficient to answer your question, and so did not do more than outline the subject of Civil War Tokens. Your letter which I am now answering is interesting if the question were a matter for argument but, unfortunately, for your position it is not.

These pieces are tokens and were issued as explained in my previous letter. There is plenty of contemporaneous record to establish this point; and if you care to call at the Museum some time, I can convince you in a few minutes in regard to the matter.

What you say about the inscription would, probably, have been comparatively modified if you had been more familiar with the subject. A great many of these tokens carried on the political slogans of the day, expressing the opinions of those who issued them. As a matter of fact, the slogan in question is a paraphrasing of one which appeared upon tokens issued under somewhat similar conditions in this country around 1830. These latter pieces are known to numismatists as the 'Hard-time Tokens'.

Token issues have been common in nearly every country when for any reason the Government failed to supply a sufficient quantity of small change. There have been two periods in the United States when they were issued; three different times in England, and such issues were frequent during the recent war in the European Continental countries. We have a large collection of these pieces of all kinds here in the Museum and, as I stated in my previous letter, over six thousand varieties of the Civil War Tokens. These pieces did not come into conflict with the counterfeiting laws of the period, and many of them are even more like the then current United States cents than the piece which you describe.

As I have said, the question is not one of argument or opinion but actual facts - and I have the facts of the case.

Very truly yours,